



Game On

Restaurants around Acadiana are serving up wild meat, fowl and gator, you just have to know where to go

Enjoying wild game dishes in Acadiana is as natural as — well, eating regular meat. Chicken and andouille gumbo is ubiquitous around the state, whereas in Cajun Country, duck and andouille is a more likely combination. In fact, in Acadiana dishes involving rabbit, boar and alligator are common menu items for the home cook.

But where does one find such delicacies — if you can call them that — in Acadiana restaurants? It's more complicated than say, locating the nearest burger joint, but it can be done.

“At home you can do whatever,” said Chef Lyle Broussard of Jack Daniel’s Bar & Grill at L’auberge Casino Resort. “Growing up we were surrounded by this stuff.”

Broussard loves to add wild game to his menu, and although South Louisiana offers endless opportunities to hunt wild game, to serve it in restaurants requires processing at a USDA-inspected and certified facility, Broussard explained.

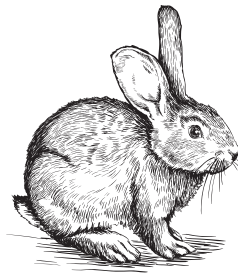
Even restaurant customers who bring in wild game to be cooked must go through a process, including cleaning the animal themselves and signing release forms, said Chef Arthur Durham of La Truffe Sauvage. Only those who bring in the game may consume the dish.

“The only reason why you can’t sell game to the public [in a restaurant] is it has to be processed,” said Toby Rodriguez, who owns Acadian Superette in downtown Lafayette.

Don’t despair, however. Even though it’s an oxymoron, there are now farms producing domestic wild game to be sold to restaurants, and many in Acadiana have these dishes on their menus.



by Chéré Coen
with accompanying
photographs
by Denny Culbert



Rabbit

Environmentally friendly, economical and able to handle heavy seasoning, hop to these restaurants to try rabbit roasted, fried or as a stew

Cajun Country is well known for its plate lunches and rabbit is sometimes on the menu. At T-Coon's in Lafayette, smothered rabbit is a Monday special, while it's on the Tuesday menu at Poche's Market in Breaux Bridge.

But it's not as popular as it should be, considering that rabbit is hunted and consumed throughout Acadiana. Pick up most Cajun cookbooks and you'll find a rabbit recipe.

When David Billeaud opened T-Coon's in Lafayette, there was only one other restaurant serving rabbit — and that seemed wrong to a man raised on the wild animal.

"Twenty-four years ago when I opened I couldn't believe no one was serving rabbit," said Billeaud, a sixth generation Billeaud from Broussard. "It always amazed me."



You know it's Monday in Lafayette when rabbit's on the menu at T-Coon's. The long-standing restaurant serves rabbit as a plate lunch special with traditional sides such as smothered cabbage.



Eat Here

1910
949 Ryan St.
Lake Charles
1910restaurant.com
337-602-6278

Jack Daniel's Bar & Grill
L'Auberge Casino Resort
Lake Charles
lakecharles.com/dining/jack-daniels-bar-and-grill
337-513-7690

La Fonda
3809 Johnston St.
Lafayette
lafonda1957.com
337-984-5630

Poche's Market
3015 Main Highway
Breaux Bridge
poches.com
337-332-2108

T-Coon's
1900 W. Pinhook Road
Lafayette
tcoons.com
337-233-0422

Take Home

The Best Stop Supermarket
615 Hwy. 93 N.
Scott
beststopinscott.com
337-233-5805

Hebert's Maurice
8212 U.S. 167
Maurice
hebertsmaurice.com
337-893-5062

Mel's Quick Stop
1894 Veterans Memorial Highway
Eunice
337-457-1958

Hackett's Cajun Kitchen
5614 Hwy. 14
Lake Charles
hackettscajunkitchen.com
337-474-3731

Lafayette restaurants have tried rabbit dishes over the years but not many have stuck with it, he said. One that has had success is La Fonda of Lafayette, a Tex-Mex restaurant best known as a "Cheers"-esque gathering spot for locals. The Johnston Street eatery has served a fried rabbit appetizer for years, consisting of bite-sized rabbit pieces accompanied by guacamole, sour cream and con queso, if desired.

When the weather dips and those north winds blow, it's time for gumbo, and for Chef Lyle Broussard of Jack Daniel's Bar & Grill at L'Auberge Casino Resort, that includes a host of elements, including rabbit.

"We do a big pot of gumbo," said the Broussard native. "We use duck, venison and rabbit, sometimes pheasant."

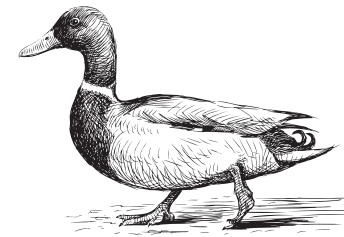
Andrew Green, who owns the restaurant 1910 in Lake Charles, likes to add dumplings to his rabbit dish once fall arrives.

For the most part, however, rabbit remains a meat best purchased in markets such as The Best Stop Supermarket in Scott, which cuts up and marinates the meat before selling to the public, or Hebert's in Maurice, which sells stuffed rabbit and a marinated boneless version.

For Chef Broussard, he buys rabbit locally from Lake Charles sources when cooking for the restaurant but when dishing up rabbit for himself, he just asks family.

"At home, I get it from relatives," he explained. "My brother has a freezer full."

As for those lunch specials, both restaurants offer rabbit in true Cajun style. T-Coon's smothered rabbit arrives with a choice of rice and gravy, rice dressing, jambalaya or two vegetables. Poche's fills a plate with smothered potatoes with tasso, green beans, potato salad and cole slaw.



Duck

Arguably the most flavorful fowl, dark, fatty duck meat is an elegant addition to gumbo or as a stand alone dish

La Truffe Sauvage fine dining in Lake Charles serves several duck dishes but the game is farm raised, said Chef Arthur Durham — and that’s a good thing.

“With wild duck, the fat under the skin layer is different,” he explained. “There’s a thick layer [with farm raised duck] because they don’t fly long distances. If you’ve had our duck here, don’t expect it to be the same as wild duck.”

The restaurant creates a crispy duck leg confit that utilizes that heavy fat beneath the skin. The meat is cured for hours or overnight in salt, sugar and seasonings to pull the moisture from the meat and to add flavor. Durham renders the fat and submerges the duck pieces in the hot fat, like braising, for 45 minutes to an hour and a half. The duck is then stored for future use in its own fat.

The process has been used for years, Durham said; the duck is preserved within the fat and can be put into earthen crocks, then removed later to be reheated and served.

“Essentially, it was like a ready-made meal,” he said of the dish’s history. “This was food preservation years ago. But it’s still useful today.”

Durham takes the previously cooked duck and heats it along with the fat so the skin side is crispy and delicious.

Other dishes La Truffe Sauvage serves are duck foie gras ravioli in a cream sauce, pan-seared Moulard duck foie gras and consommé de canard, a whole duck broken down with the bones used for the consommé.

If you’re looking for duck gumbo to satisfy on a chilly winter night, Charley G’s

of Lafayette serves up a dark roux duck and andouille gumbo that has been popular for decades. The recipe was created by Carol “Pops” Boudreaux, who died earlier this year.

The restaurant also serves duck and tasso spring rolls and a crispy duck entrée.

Nash’s fine dining in Broussard takes half of a semi-boneless duck and oven roasts it for crispiness, then serves it over rice with a peach brandy glaze. Blue Dog Café, with locations in both Lafayette and Lake Charles, marinates its duck with a teriyaki sauce and tops with a honey glaze.

For something more casual, visit Loggerheads outside Lake Charles, where visitors will enjoy a fabulous view of the Calcasieu River, and indulge in some duck appetizers with libations as the sun sets. Choose from the duck wontons filled with cream cheese, duck bacon and sweet corn that’s fried to a crisp or the duck tenderloins, marinated duck that’s encrusted with panko breading and flaked almonds, deep fried and served with the Loggerheads’ homemade sweet and spicy dipping sauce.

For something unusual, Botsky’s of Lake Charles, known for its innovative hot dogs, tops smoked duck sausage with feta cheese, spinach, a cherry and Steen’s reduction sauce for its “Duck Norris” hot dog.

Bon Temps Grill in Lafayette marries crispy duck drumettes tossed in housemade mango sauce and twice-cooked gator legs smothered in a sweet and spicy Thai sauce.



La Truffe Sauvage of Lake Charles offers several duck dishes on the menu but the most popular is the crispy duck leg confit with creamy risotto in a red wine sauce.



Eat Here

Blue Dog Café
609 Ryan St.
Lake Charles
bluedogcafe.com
337-491-8880

Bon Temps Grill
1312 Verot School Road
Lafayette
bontempsgrill.com
337-706-8850

Botsky's
104 W. Pujo St.
Lake Charles
facebook.com/Botskys
337-491-1155

Charley G's
3809 Ambassador
Caffery Parkway
Lafayette
charleygs.com
337-981-0108

Loggerheads
3748 La. Hwy. 3059
Lake Charles
facebook.com/loggerheads
337-491-6794

Mazen's and Mazen Grill
Lake Charles and Lafayette
mazengrill.com
337-477-8207
337-769-4440

Nash's
101 E. Second St.
Broussard
nashsrestaurant.com
337-839-9333

Prejean's
3480 N.E. Evangeline
Throughway
Lafayette
prejeans.com
337-896-3247

La Truffe Sauvage
815 Bayou Pines Drive
Lake Charles
thewildtruffle.com
337-439-8364



Bison

Prized as a lean alternative to beef, bison is flavorful and nutritious

The idea for the Red Gate Bison Ranch outside Poplarville, Mississippi began 40 years ago when Andre Toups of New Orleans viewed bison for the first time out West.

“He fell in love with them, has [loved them] since he was 16 years old,” said Andre’s wife, Beth Toups. “He said he would own a buffalo farm one day. So, we always knew there would be a buffalo farm in our future.”

When the couple retired, the first thing they considered was land for a herd of bison. They attended conferences and learned the trade but quickly realized there was no “local buy” near Louisiana, or a way to purchase bison meat within 250 miles of their Baton Rouge home.

“We realized there was a potential market here,” Beth Toups said.

The Toupses knew the animals lived in Louisiana and Mississippi and were hunted by the Choctaw in the early 1800s, so bison brought in from colder climates would adjust to South’s high temperatures. They purchased descendants from the Custer State Park herd, one of the world’s largest publicly-owned bison herds, and opened their ranch on land not far from the Louisiana line.

“It took about a year for the bison to adapt,” Toups said. “That first year they were panting. But they did fine.”

Bison might not be the most available meat on the Louisiana market, but it’s starting to appear in Acadiana restaurants. It’s a leaner, more nutritious meat, high in B-12, iron and omega 3s; low in calories and cholesterol; and, according to Toups, a nice alternative to beef since studies have shown it reverses cardio disease.

“It’s the only mammal that has never been known to have cancer,” she explained.

“It’s a leaner cut of meat,” said Ben Duck, who serves a bison burger from his Xtreme Eats food truck weekdays in New Iberia. “It’s still very flavorful but it has less fat and less calories.”

Duck also sells bison patties out of his store of the same name, offering prepped meals that are a healthy alternative to red meat, he said. All of his bison meat comes from a distributor in Texas.

Burgersmith in Lafayette also cooks up a bison burger, acquiring its meat from Colorado and seasoning it lightly and topping with lettuce, tomato, red onions, chipotle mayonnaise and smoked gouda cheese.

Botsky’s of Lake Charles, which specializes in unusual hot dog creations, uses bison, as well as duck and gator, for its sausage meats.

“We hit all of the Louisiana meats even though bison isn’t local to us,” said owner Lee Boudreaux.

Chef Lyle Broussard of Jack Daniel’s Bar & Grill at L’Auberge Casino Resort loved cooking bison ribeyes in the past but the meat became too expensive, he said.

“I smoked and served bison ribs a long time ago,” he said. “They went fast. Real fast.”

Currently, Toups only sells her bison meat to individuals.

“Most of our clients are private individuals who are interested in eating healthy,” she said.



Xtreme Eats food truck in New Iberia believes in serving leaner, healthier food items, which is why a bison burger is on the menu, a flavorful meat with less calories and fat.



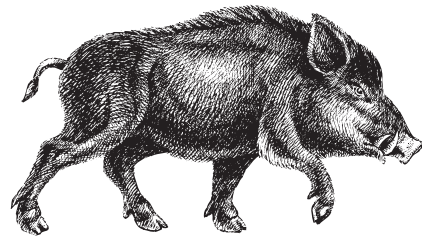
Eat Here

Botsky’s
104 W. Pujo St.
Lake Charles
[facebook.com/Botskys](https://www.facebook.com/Botskys)
337-491-1155

Burgersmith
1314 Camellia Blvd.
Lafayette
[burgersmith.com](https://www.burgersmith.com)
337-504-5015

Red Gate Ranch
Poplarville, Mississippi
[redgatebison.com](https://www.redgatebison.com)

Xtreme Eats
601 E. Admiral Doyle Drive
New Iberia
[xtremenutritionla.com](https://www.xtremenutritionla.com)
337-364-7200



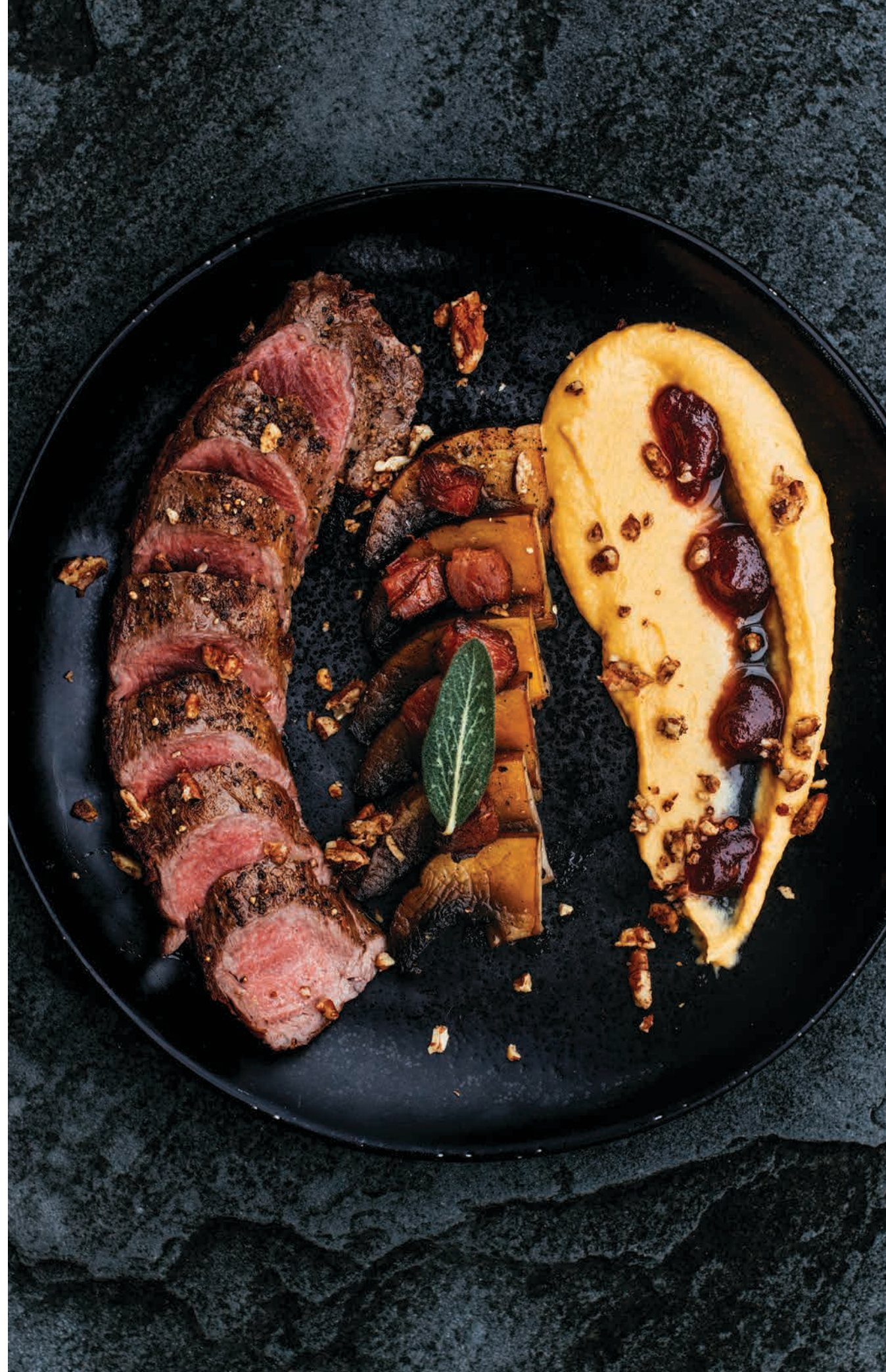
Boar

It requires special processing if wild, so a few Acadiana restaurants opt to serve up farm-raised boar meat, which flies off the menu, especially in the fall

Wild boar or feral pigs create a nuisance to south Louisiana wetlands and prairies. They destroy crops and habitats, add to soil erosion, uproot tree seedlings and impact wildlife by competing for food or eating deer fawns and other species. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries estimates there are about half a million feral hogs in all 64 Louisiana parishes.

Boar could be a viable alternative to farm-raised pork, said Toby Rodriguez, who owns Acadiana Superette in Lafayette and specializes in boucherie, or pig butchering. Hunting the beasts would provide meat while eliminating a destructive animal to Louisiana's habitats. Not having to raise the pigs on farms and send them to stockyards would decrease that industry's carbon footprint as well, he added.

"It's free pork," Rodriguez said. "It's the original free-range pig."



Wild boar is regularly consumed by Louisiana hunters but is difficult to find in Acadiana restaurants. Not so for 1910 in Lake Charles, which serves boar tenderloins with a chutney sauce.

But it's not that simple. Boar meat, like other game, must be processed in a USDA-inspected facility. For wild boar to be processed in Louisiana, the plant must shut down for a day to process only that species so as to contain any pests or diseases they may bring in, Rodriguez explained.

Andrew Green, who owns 1910 in Lake Charles, loves to serve wild boar tenderloins on his menu, but the meat comes from a North Carolina farm that raises boar for restaurant consumption.

"It's a farm-raised wild boar species that's been domesticated," Green said, adding that the animals are fed a diet of nuts and berries. "It's gamey but not too gamey in the fall."

His boar tenderloins are topped with a cranberry-Granny Smith apple chutney, a thick condiment that Green says works well this time of year.

"We're big fans of the boar," he said. "It's a dark, deep red meat."

Green hasn't shied away from unusual meats since opening his restaurant in a historic building on the corner of Ryan and Kirby streets in Lake Charles.

"This time of year we do more game — rabbit and dumplings, elk ribeye and the wild boar tenderloins," Green said.

Chef Lyle Broussard doesn't serve boar at his Jack Daniel's Bar & Grill at L'Auberge Casino Resort but hailing from the country, he's not shy about trapping, serving them domestic feed "to clean out their systems" and slaughtering the pigs.

"At home we can do whatever," Broussard said. "But for restaurants we have to buy what's USDA inspected and certified."

If Broussard does serve boar obtained through the proper channels, "it flies off the shelf," he said.

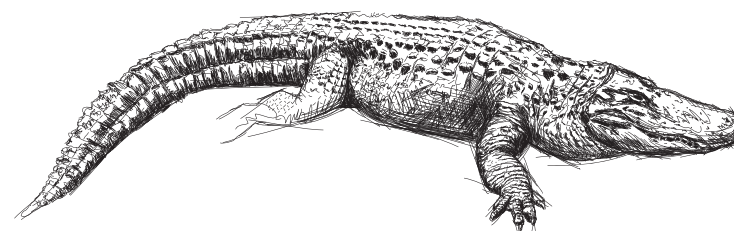
"People like it," he explained. "I've never had an issue with it."



Eat Here

1910
949 Ryan St., Lake Charles
1910restaurant.com
337-602-6278

Jack Daniel's
Bar & Grill
L'Auberge Casino Resort
Lake Charles
llakecharles.com/
dining/jack-daniels-
bar-and-grill
337-513-7690



Alligator

Most places bread and fry it, but alligator is a Cajun standard that can be found in sauces, roulettes, boudin, burgers and more

In 1962, overhunting of alligator caused the Louisiana reptile to land on the endangered species list, which prompted hunting to cease. After a decade of protection, the alligator season reopened marginally, then statewide in 1981. Today, alligators are raised both on farms and exist in great numbers in the wild.

“Now, they are roaming the golf courses again,” said Richard Hurst, co-owner with his wife Lori Hurst of Poor Boy’s Riverside Inn in Broussard and Little River Inn in New Iberia.

The Hursts have a history of serving alligator at their restaurants, even when acquiring alligator meat “was hit and miss,” Hurst said. Like most game, restaurants must purchase their product from distributors and processors, which has improved in the past years.

“Before we were having a tough time getting the alligator,” Hurst said. “Not so much during the off-seasons but [due to] the difficulty of processing.”

Both restaurants serve fried and grilled alligator, plus alligator boulettes, rolled stuffing that’s fried and accompanied by a remoulade sauce.

Randol’s of Lafayette and DI’s of Basile, both known for their dance floors as well as their Cajun dishes, serve up alligator tail meat as appetizers. Randol’s fries up the meat and serves it with a remoulade sauce, as do many restaurants in Acadiana, while DI’s offers blackened alligator as well as fried bites. Rikenjaks Brewing Company in Lake Charles adds its signature “jezebel sauce” to its alligator boulettes.

For something unusual, Acadiana Poboy in Lafayette takes the low-fat meat and turns

it into a burger. Bon Temps Grill of Lafayette invented the “BBQ Alligator Doria,” where cheese and boudin are stuffed with alligator, then grilled and served over vegetables. Botsky’s in Lake Charles takes alligator sausage and serves it like a hot dog topped with Cajunkraut, Swiss cheese, grilled onions and creole mustard.

Boudreau and Thibodeau’s in Houma prefers a spicy tomato-based alligator sauce piquante, a Cajun standard that’s a favorite among visitors, said Mike Blanchard, who owns the restaurant with his wife, Debra.

“We really want to sell the Cajun heritage,” Blanchard said. “We serve authentic Cajun food, like traditional camp dishes. We wanted fresh Cajun food, like you grew up with.”

Alligator meat ground up as sausage makes for a great ingredient in poor boy sandwiches. Zydeco’s in Boutte and Acadiana Poboy in Lafayette offer gator poor boys, as does Suire’s Grocery in Kaplan.

Chef Lyle Broussard of Jack Daniel’s Bar & Grill in L’auberge Casino Resort loves to serve alligator on his menu, but sometimes for private parties, Broussard purchases a whole alligator, wraps it in bacon and slow cooks the reptile for about eight hours. Naturally, the gator dish takes people by surprise.

“That’s the reaction you’ve got to see,” he said.

It sounds like dessert, but Prejean’s alligator cheesecake marries their smokehouse alligator sausage with Gulf shrimp, cream cheese and Creole seasonings that’s baked over a Parmesan and panko crust and topped with the restaurant’s crawfish Cardinale cream sauce.



Boudreau and Thibodeau’s restaurant in Houma serves up traditional Cajun dishes such as alligator sauce piquante served over rice. There’s also fried gator bites that the tourists adore.



Eat Here

Acadiana Poboy
2848 Verot School Road
Lafayette
337-856-2511

Bon Temps Grill
1312 Verot School Road
Lafayette
bontempsgrill.com
337-706-8850

Botsky’s
104 W. Pujio St.
Lake Charles
facebook.com/Botskys
337-491-1155

Boudreau and Thibodeau’s
5602 W. Main St.
Houma
bntcajuncookin.com
985-872-4711

DI’s
6561 Evangeline Hwy.
Basile
discajunrestaurant.com
337-432-5141

Poor Boy’s Riverside Inn
240 Tubing Road
Broussard
poorboysriversideinn.com
337-837-4011

Little River Inn
833 E. Main St.
New Iberia
poorboysriversideinn.com
337-367-7466

Prejeans
3480 N.E. Evangeline
Throughway
Lafayette
prejeans.com
337-896-3247

Rikenjaks Brewing Company
3716 Ryan St.
Lake Charles
rikenjaks.com
337-602-6635

Suire’s Grocery
13923 Hwy. 35 S.
Kaplan
suire.yolasite.com
337-643-8911

Zydeco’s
13228 U.S. 90
Boutte
zydecos.biz
985-308-1058